

## My Desire for an Education

A small muddy stream flowed through Baayuu, taking its source from a ravine to the northwest of Zayayn Baayuu. Along the north bank of this stream was a recreation hall, a central sanatorium, and the aimag ministry, middle school and other institutions which had separate modern log buildings. In a corner west of this street was a specially built wooden "recreation" building, and behind this there was a fenced-in enclosure of average size in which around twenty gers had been set up in rows.

Our school had been established with about 140 pupils drawn from poor and middle-ranking households. The aim of this school was to train new personnel for the cooperatives. Three or four of the gers were for girls and the rest were for boys. In accordance with contemporary requirements, the school was a semi-military establishment. The 140 pupils were grouped into three divisions and each division was divided into companies. The leader of each ger was in charge of ten people, four or five gers would make up a division and a company student leader was appointed by the head teacher to be in charge of ten divisions. As far as administration and education were concerned, the company leaders were controlled by the head teacher or his deputy. At that time, our company leader was the oldest student, Darjaa. After he had completed his military service, he became head of the Central Security Police from 1940-1950.

We used to rise early in the morning to parade and do physical exercises. Later on in the day we again paraded. Before bed the roll was called. Pupils wore a sheepskin deel the color of yellow cotton drill, and each pupil had a hat made of white lamb's skin, and black working boots. Morning and evening meals consisted of bread and butter with tea. The mid-day meal included meat, vegetables, and soup with noodles. Buuz and khuushuur were provided during celebrations. It was here that I had my first taste of cabbage, potatoes, and bread. Initially, I left these things uneaten, but eventually I got used to them.

The classrooms consisted of four or five gers fitted out with trestle tables. Lessons were given in Mongolian script, arithmetic, political studies, and agriculture. Four to six hours of lessons would be given every day. There were two teachers, Ts. Baldan and B. Sanjaasüren. Baldan gave us interesting lessons on physical geography and politics. Our teacher Sanjaasüren used easily understood examples when teaching the four areas of arithmetic. We used to practice our lessons in the ger late in the evening and we would go to our teachers to check out certain things. The two teachers had actually just completed a course at the student college in Ulaanbaatar. We respected them very much, both for being highly educated and for their highly principled and friendly relationship with the pupils.

The leader of our group of ten pupils was called Sharav. He set out the rules of the ger, appointed people to take their turn at being on duty, safeguarded hygiene, implemented schedules, directed homework, made announcements, and did other leadership

work. He was a very energetic leader, but sometimes behaved in a harsh manner. In addition to scolding people he on occasion prolonged the section meetings, which wasted time and interfered with our homework. There were many examples of Sharav's own code of discipline. He was vigorous and clever in public work, and although well educated he occasionally told lies.

In accordance with the custom at the time, one evening our school held a friendly meeting with the pupils of the aimag middle school in their Red Corner. This meeting took the form of a quiz competition between the two schools. We sang together several times and a middle school girl came in first in the quiz competition, with a girl from our school getting second place. Five wrestlers from each school came out to wrestle, and one of our pupils came in first. Next, there was a theory competition. Five questions were asked in each subject area, covering politics, biology, physics, and chemistry. The competition was conducted by one teacher from each side. Since this competition was very interesting, all the students, including myself, noted down the questions and answers. At the end of the tournament, the results were added up and the winners and runners up in the singing, wrestling, and theory competitions were awarded exercise books and pencils.

The theory competition became very interesting. As the following day was a rest day, the students did not want to be dismissed and expressed their wish to continue with the competition. The teachers agreed. It was very late and the kerosene lamp looked smoky suspended from the roof of the wooden building. By the time some of the children had dozed off on their wooden boards, nearly all the teachers had left except for a teacher who taught military lessons.

That evening, our section leader, Sharav, was wearing an army-style cotton shirt and trousers, braces, and a fine belt. A considerable number of badges had been pinned to his braces, each one attached to a circle of red cloth. He looked very elegant. The questions which could not be answered in the theory competition were helpfully explained by the teachers. At the end, section leader Sharav stood up and asked a question:

"Where did man first originate?" One of the middle-school pupils stood up and replied that Man originated from the apes. Sharav rose and asked, "And where was that monkey then?" The other pupil replied: "He was in some warm country, like Europe." "Couldn't it have been a cold country?" Sharav asked. "It might have been" the pupil replied. Sharav was seen carefully taking one of the books and pencils which were to be given away as prizes. He asked "Where in Mongolia did the apes, which were the origin of man, live? The pupil could not answer.

As none of the other pupils at that school could answer either, the questioner himself answered to rightfully take the prize. Sharav rose, saying, "These apes used to live in our Gobi and to the south of Khovd." The students were all amazed and noted it down in their books. So our Sharav got his book and pencil. The next day, when the teacher was conducting the class, he made Sharav stand up and after scolding him a little, explained to us that there was no evidence to say that the apes which were the predecessors of man, ever lived in our Gobi.

Although the ger where we lived was warm, it was smoky, and so a Chinese stove-repairer wearing old sheepskin trousers and a white sheepskin jacket came once to repair the stove. The clay of the stove had fallen off due to our carelessness and smoke was puffing out. While the Chinese was fixing the stove, the students helped him and some of them decided to fix the stoves themselves. As the stove in our ger had largely

collapsed, one day I repaired it. In order to fix our stove, I took a large enamelled wash basin which was outside the door of the women's ger and after mixing some clay in it, I repaired the stove. After lighting a fire in the stove, it turned out quite well. Even our section leader praised me saying that it was quite good.

The following day I was suddenly summoned by the Division commander. I went in and stood there quietly. There was a girl pupil called Dolgor who was sitting and crying at one side of the ger. It turned out that she had brought the wash basin to wash her face in when she first arrived at the school. Not knowing this, I had mixed clay in it to repair the stove. That being the case I was guilty and I decided that I should wash and clean the basin for her.

I left the division commander's ger and brought in the wash basin left outside the door of the women's ger the previous day. I warmed it on the stove and used a piece of iron to prise off the frozen clay, peeling off some of the enamel in places. Then, after washing the basin clean I went up to the door of that ger and when I knocked at it, Dolgor appeared. On seeing the wash basin she threw it on the ground. I knew the reason for this, and with the matter still unresolved, I was very worried.

That evening, the leader of our group of ten told me that I was being summoned by the senior teacher Baldan. I entered the teacher's ger and stood in silence. The chief of the sum was standing there and the girl Dolgor stood crying. The teacher, Ts. Baldan asked me about the mixing of clay in the wash basin and the peeling-off of the enamel. He said "You have done a good deed in repairing the stove in this school. Let Shirendev be praised on the notice board! Let this girl Dolgor scold all she wants!" and he let us go. This was the first time I had been summoned about a problem, and I was extremely pleased that the matter had been concluded in this way. Afterwards, I repaired the school stoves on several occasions. The school gave me an old wash-basin to mix clay in.

When the pupils at the school developed coughs, they were examined by the Soviet doctor of the aimag hospital, S. M. Nemoi. This man was a very pleasant character and was kind to the children. His wife was a paramedic and the couple had a baby. One day, the Pioneer organization of our school made the doctor an honorary pioneer and presented him with a tie. The doctor spoke Mongolian quite well.

On the May 1 holiday in Tsetserleg, all the town's people—Mongols, Russians, and Chinese—gathered in the recreation area and formed a parade. The aimag Party committee and the leaders of the administration climbed up some steps to a platform raised on four long legs called an inder, where they made their speeches. When a Soviet instructor delivered greetings in Russian that day his speech and manner, voice, attire, and Russian language all seemed strange to me. At that time, Tsetserleg had a Russian doctor, a Russian primary school, and Russian instructors. They all lived and worked in comfortable yellow buildings made of logs and with glass windows. They had planted trees alongside the buildings.

I had become acquainted with a student pioneer named Kochetov who was at the Russian primary school in Tsetserleg. I used to frequently meet with him. He was interested in the Mongolian language and I was interested in Russian words. Thus, once when I happened to be outside his family's house, they invited me in to visit with their son. That was the first time I had visited a Russian household. The house in which they lived had a shiny painted wooden floor, several rooms, and everyone in the household, including the boy, had his or her own comfortable bed.

While I was at school there, during 1929-1930, the property of the feudalists

was being confiscated and the government was elected to carry out many political activities to reduce their power. Responsible officials of the aimag used to take one or two students with them into the countryside to show us the work being carried out. I accompanied a member of the aimag cooperative called "KUTV" Sharav [KUTV being an acronym for Communist University for the Workers of the East] to Tsenkher sum where we watched a taij being stripped of his powers at a district meeting held in the left hand ger of two gers set up under the shelter of a large rock face.

The day prior to the meeting, I had accompanied Sharav to the large ger of a household on the west side of an encampment. The wife of the household spread a rug for us and entertained us with some tea and a meal. The owner of the household was the taij who had been stripped of power.

Soon afterwards, Sharav went out to spend the night in a tiny ger on the south-east side. Then, many people arrived from all directions on horseback, and a district meeting was held to discuss and criticize that taij. The taij was not permitted to be present. Having discussed the original question, it was decided to strip the taij of his elected powers. This was confirmed by a show of hands. At one point the chairman of the meeting ordered a servant to go and look around outside. The servant returned saying "There was a lama, a relative of the taij, standing outside and listening. I chased him off." All through this period, the teachers talked about the ever-increasing struggle with the feudal lamas.

One day, we saw a large gathering of people who were waiting to be tried at the recreation ground. Some of the students from our school were allowed to go to watch some of the trial. A group of people from Övörkhangaï aimag was standing trial, including one Sengedorj who was a banner chief and had feudal ancestry. After a hearing, the judge and chief prosecutor asked some questions to which the guilty replied. Sengedorj replied once and the lama replied twice: "It is true that we have been preparing to flee abroad. We have also been opposing the people's government." We then had to leave the trial and returned to school. Later we heard that some of the guilty had been executed and some had been sentenced to many years in prison.

Around that time, some lamas had attacked the official establishments and schools around temples such as Tariat Khüree. Sometimes they would band together in order to capture and beat the banner civil servants. They would also head towards the homes of the teachers where they had been known to thrust knives through the felt walls of the gers.

In accordance with directives at that time, all the officials of the aimag center and the school pupils assembled regularly for military training and to conduct mock battles between the "Whites" and the "Reds". On Saturdays and Sundays we went into the forests in a ravine on the northwest side of Tsetserleg town to gather firewood for the official organizations in the aimag center.

Some days we performed a shadow theater or held singing and musical evenings. Generally, the musicians sang old-fashioned songs, and played music on string instruments, such as horsehead fiddles and flutes. Among them was a youngish girl called Dolgorsüren who was a good shanz player. She was said to be the last wife of the Zaya Gegeen. The Zaya Gegeen used to live in a European-style building on a terrace on the east side of Zayayn Khüree. While we were at school, the Zaya Gegeen was implicated in an uprising and imprisoned. However, around that time the monastery lamas were spreading rumours that when their "teacher" had been taken to Ulaanbaatar and

imprisoned, the gegeen multiplied a thousand times and could not be contained in prison, and neither could anyone tell which person was the real Zaya Gegeen. When talk of such magical powers of the Zaya Gegeen were discussed, the Party committee people told us it was all lies.

The male officials usually wore leather deel and military-style shirts and trousers. The women cut their hair short and wore short-sleeved deel. The members of the aimag Party committee, aimag ministries, cooperatives, internal security organizations and the army divisional officers wore military-style uniforms and generally carried guns.